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# Choreographing a dance for performers with a variety of physical abilities

Edvins Puris

*San Jose State University*

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CHOREOGRAPHING A DANCE FOR PERFORMERS WITH A VARIETY OF  
PHYSICAL ABILITIES

A Thesis

Presented to

The Department of Human Performance  
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree  
Masters of Arts

by

Edvins Puris

August 1995

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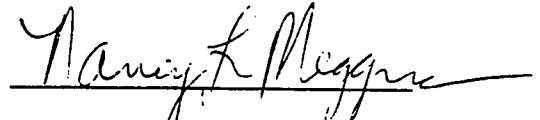
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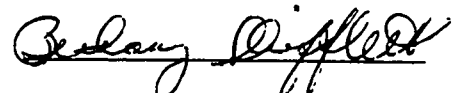
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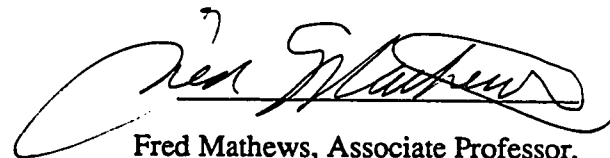
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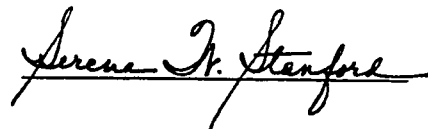
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## ABSTRACT

### CHOREOGRAPHING A DANCE FOR PERFORMERS WITH A VARIETY OF PHYSICAL ABILITIES

by Edvins Puris

The goal of this masters thesis was to choreograph a dance, "Riders of the Storm," for performers with a variety of movement abilities. This work, thirteen minutes in length, was performed by five dancers. Two dancers used wheelchairs to facilitate their performance. The choreographer attempted to integrate performers with a variety of movement abilities into a unified work. The author documented this process by maintaining a rehearsal log. The audience filled out questionnaires after the performance which evaluated the dance's emotional content and choreography. The general audience and experts agreed that "Riders of the Storm" successfully integrated the dancers with disabilities into a well choreographed work. The audience enjoyed this dance and it also maintained their attention. According to experts, "Riders of the Storm" would have benefited from more frequent changes in the movement dynamic and from more movement exploration for the dancers with disabilities.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

A goal of physical education is to develop a person's understanding and appreciation of their bodies. Adapted physical education, or APE, has an identical goal but with an individualized approach and a more specialized delivery system. APE adjusts any learning environment to suit the special needs of individuals in order to insure successful participation. APE specialists are trained to evaluate, develop, and prescribe activities that will help individuals with disabilities to overcome limitations in the psychomotor domain.

APE provides a comprehensive system of services that allows individuals with disabilities to participate in special programs through schools and universities. After graduation, individuals with special needs can participate in recreational programs while elite athletes with disabilities have the opportunity to compete nationally or even internationally.

Dance is included in the definition of adapted physical activities. Dance is a uniquely adaptive activity because it is not task or goal oriented. A choreographer can easily change movement to ensure that individuals with disabilities can participate fully. Dance is also an artistic activity because it allows individuals to express themselves through movement. Dance is a uniquely appropriate yet seldom used activity for individuals with disabilities (Sherrill, 1993).

Although dance has many merits for diverse populations, no research paradigm exists with which to document and evaluate the choreographic process. Dance research has been limited to historical topics. Universities offer classes in composition, but choreography itself has rarely been researched.

For modern dance, the choreographic process relies heavily on intuition and abstraction. Intuition is difficult to research in the traditional fashion (Kahlich, 1991).

To gain acceptance and remain in the academic setting, modern dance scholars should consider developing a new research paradigm for choreography. Kahlich, a writer and choreographer, believed that choreographic research should include the evaluation of the final product, and the written documentation of the conceptual, intuitive and developmental processes.

The purpose of this masters thesis project was to document and evaluate the choreographic process of creating a dance for individuals with a variety of abilities. The development of this project was documented in a rehearsal log, which was then compared to the choreographic process found in the literature. The meeting of the choreographer's goals and intentions were evaluated by questionnaires administered to dance experts and the general public immediately after viewing the performance. Three specialists in adapted dance, who did not attend the performance, viewed a video tape of the dance before completing the questionnaire.

This project had considerable limitations. All the performers were students with demanding schedules. The choreographer worked with a time constraint that was compounded by schedule conflicts and absenteeism. The two dancers with disabilities had no prior dance experience. Additionally, the performance was presented in a gymnasium with no technical assistance.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of Literature

The choreographer researched the literature available on the compositional process and on dancers with disabilities. Dance appeared to be a sufficiently adaptive activity to ensure the full participation of dancers with disabilities. Most of the choreographic principles described in the literature for dancers without disabilities also applied to dancers with disabilities. The literature for dancers with disabilities described these performers as physically capable of dance, and that dance had many physical and creative benefits for its participants.

#### The Three Elements of Dance

Horst (1987) reduced movement in modern dance into three elements: design, rhythm, and dynamics. The design element refers to the shape a body or a body part creates in space. The rhythmic element dictates when a movement is executed and the dynamic element describes how and with what quality a body or body part moves.

Humphrey (1959) argued that motivation should be included as a fourth element. She wanted dancers to have an internal motivation for every movement. Anything less, she argued, would leave the audience unfulfilled.

#### The Building Blocks of Dance

Dance, just like music, can be broken down into smaller and smaller structural components. Horst (1987) defined the motif as the smallest unit in dance. A motif represents a single movement idea, gesture or action. Two or more motifs combine to create a phrase, and phrases linked together create an entire dance. Structuring a dance by phrases aids the audience's comprehension and enjoyment of abstract movement. The natural pauses between phrases allows the audience to reflect upon the significance of a movement directly after it occurs. Humphrey (1959) defined a phrase as having a



dynamic high point along with a distinct beginning, middle, and end. The high point in a phrase coincides with a dramatic increase or decrease in a movement's dynamic.

### Structuring a Dance

The largest structural component in a dance is the theme or form (Murray, 1963). It provides the foundation and structure for an entire work. A theme is either an emotional component or a visual esthetic that stimulates the creation of phrases. For example, a dancer creating a dance about war may abstract movement from feelings of pain. A single theme can link a few phrases or it can structure an entire dance. By inspiring the creation of phrases, form also creates unity in a dance. Murray found that as the number of similar elements (design, rhythm, and dynamic) increased between two phrases so did their relatedness. Humphrey (1959) believed that form was the most important choreographic concern because it allowed an audience to access and formulate opinions about abstract movement.

Horst (1987) defined the most basic form in dance as A-B-A. In this format a theme is introduced (A), then the theme is developed (B), and finally the original theme (A) is re-introduced. Horst explained that new themes can be created by repeating, expanding, contracting, or inverting old ones. Any one of the three dance elements can be manipulated in order to develop a theme.

Choreography is a complex process that occurs on many levels. During composition, a choreographer must be equally aware of the intuitive process, which creates material, and the intellect, which evaluates material using the formal rules of composition (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1985). The intellect maintains continuity in a dance by objectively structuring the intuitively generated material. During choreography, the intuitive and cognitive processes can occur simultaneously or one after another.

### Choreographic Stages

Chaffee (1974) divided the choreographic process into four theoretical stages: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. During the preparation stage, a choreographer researches and accumulates ideas. In the incubation stage, ideas are formulating in the unconscious, but have not consciously materialized. The illumination stage is an involuntary burst of ideas, insights, and inspirations. The verification stage is a cognitive elaboration and application of the choreographic principles.

### Choreographic Principles

The choreographic principles applied during the verification stage have evolved through a process of trial and error. These established principles have two main characteristics: they help the choreographer to clearly express his/her artistic intention and they facilitate the audience's comprehension of the dance.

Humphrey (1959) established many important choreographic principles involving stage space, group design, dance structure, and movement dynamic. Humphrey analyzed the inherently strong and weak areas on stage. Visually, the most significant areas on stage were the four corners and the center. The most powerful entrances were the upstage diagonals and the most dramatic exits were the down stage diagonals. All intermediate and outlying areas were less visually powerful. Choreographers were urged to utilize the stage's inherent zones of strength and weakness to create visually dynamic works.

Humphrey (1959) believed that group design must stress simplicity. A complicated group design created a cluttered and chaotic impression. Choreographers were advised to limit the number of contrasting elements during group design.

Additional principles were formulated by Humphrey (1959) that she deemed essential for successful choreography: a good ending is 40% of a dance, and its choreography should not be left until the end; "symmetry is lifeless" and should be avoided at all costs; choreographers should look for contrasts as to remain in the same

dynamic too long is fatal and all movement appears “slower and weaker on stage.”

Finally, Humphrey believed that gestures represented important choreographic tool which could convey powerful narrative messages.

Hawkins (1964) warned that insufficiently abstracted gestures could be literally interpreted and thus break the continuity of a dance. Humphrey (1959) also believed that each artist had an obligation to take a stand. Every artist, she continued, was a spokesperson for society and therefore needed to grapple with current issues. An artist, according to Humphrey, should strive to personally and meaningfully express themselves.

#### Dance and Individuals with Disabilities

Two of the dancers in this dance performed using wheelchairs. No research has looked at injuries incurred by dancers using wheelchairs. All research for wheelchair injuries focused on endurance sports. The most common injury in wheelchair endurance sports was carpal tunnel syndrome (Mangos, 1988). The dancers in this project met only twice a week and, therefore, were not at risk for carpal tunnel syndrome.

No research exists that specifically explores how the choreographic process adapts to dancers with disabilities. Many studies, however, have examined the adaptive nature of dance for individuals with disabilities. A number of these studies addressed the relationship between dance and a positive increases in mental and physical health. Gurley, Neuringer, and Masee (1984) found that dance had a more positive effect on a subject's psychological well-being than either sports or academic classes. Couper (1981) found improvements in self-image, social skills, and kinesthetic sense for children with learning disabilities. Dance programs studied for a time period of eight weeks or less did not produce positive psychological effects from dance (Jette, 1981) or physical activity (Ford, Puckett, Blessing, & Tucker, 1989). The positive effects of dance may begin to manifest themselves only after eight weeks.

Dance's expressive nature may be one of the factors that positively influences a person's mental health. Communicating physically, dance can sometimes reach individuals in situations where speech cannot. Schwartz (1989) found that dance established contact and then promoted growth for individuals with developmental delays.

Dance can be a successful means for reaching children with communication challenges. Freundlich, Pike, and Schwartz (1989) observed that movement changes positively affected a child's total functioning. Leitschuh and Brotons (1991) found that dance and music successfully reached adolescents with behavior problems.

Research, however, found mixed results on the relationship between dance and positive changes in body image, self-esteem and social behavior for individuals with developmental delays. Crain, Eisenhart, and McLaughlin (1984) found that dance increased positive social/physical behavior and body image for individuals with developmental delays. Roswell, Sherrill, and Roswell (1988), however, found that creative dance improved dance skill, but not perception of self-concept, body image, balance or agility.

Dance has inherent playful and communicative qualities which make it an ideal therapeutic activity for children with hearing deficits. Chamberlein-Rickard (1982) found that children with hearing disabilities experienced dance as "highly visual, tactile, kinesthetic and motivational." Wisher (1972) found that dance improved the emotional, physical, intellectual and social components for a group of young adolescent women with hearing impairments.

Dance is accessible to individuals from all age groups. The elderly enjoy dance because it improves their self-concept and strengthens their physical resolve (Berryman-Miller, 1988). Titzel (1986), however, found that a dance-movement program did not increase the self-concept of institutionalized elderly women.

Research has not explored the relationship between dancers using wheelchairs and modern dance. Hill (1976), however, did study the effect of ballroom dancing on individuals who use wheelchairs. He found that ballroom dancing increased an individual's confidence and helped them cope with their disability.

#### Dance and Individuals with CP or Poliomyelitis

One of the dancers with disabilities was an individual with cerebral palsy (CP). CP affects the motor control areas of the brain, but it should not be confused with mental retardation. Although 30-70% of individuals with cerebral palsy also have mental retardation, it should not be assumed of the whole population. Most individuals with CP have multiple disabilities affecting their speech, learning, visual, hearing or perceptual skills. Most individuals with CP also have some degree of spasticity (Sherrill, 1993).

No research has explored the relationship between dance and individuals with CP. Many studies, however, have documented the movement challenges and the optimum performance environment for individuals with CP. McCubbin and Shasby (1985) found that individuals with CP moved with less control and less efficiency. Hall and Gardner (1981) found that individuals with CP were as kinesthetically sensitive as able-bodied subjects but lacked confidence about the desired outcome. Beuter (1984) discovered that individuals with CP experienced more difficulty coordinating movement between joints than individuals without CP. Beuter and Garfinkel (1985) explained that individuals with CP have less control over their bodies because they have more variables to contend with while moving. Horgan (1980) found that verbal praise lead to significantly superior results for children with CP in reaction-time and movement time tasks. Individuals with CP face great movement challenges, but research has shown that verbal praise can give dancers with CP the confidence to perform optimally.

The other dancer using a wheelchair had poliomyelitis. Polio is a virus that attacks nerve cells in the spine causing quadriplegia or paraplegia. Polio affects only the

motor cells, not feeling or sensations (Sherrill, 1993). Einarson (1991) found that individuals with polio can maintain or increase their strength through physical activity and exercise.

### Documenting and Evaluating the Choreographic Process

The review of literature did not universally support the positive effects of dance for individuals with disabilities. Dance, however, can easily be adapted to fit individuals' diverse abilities (Schwartz, 1989). Dance integrates multiple experiences for an individual by combining movement, expression, creativity and music into a single activity. This requires great dedication and commitment from dancers, but they are rewarded with increased self-awareness. Dance allows individuals to enter new realms by asking them to communicate with their bodies (Bernstein, 1977).

The fact that choreography is difficult to document and evaluate should not deter individuals from researching disabled dance. Given modern dance's adaptable nature and its many positive attributes, choreographing, documenting, and evaluating a dance for individuals with disabilities can be a worthy endeavor.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methods

Choreography for "Riders of the Storm" evolved from an adaptive dialogue that occurred amongst the dancers and the choreographer. The author fostered this interaction until a new compositional process had emerged. The choreographer documented this process in a rehearsal log. After its completion, this log was compared to the choreographic processes found in the literature. After the performance, the audience evaluated the dance. Before filling out the questionnaire, every audience gave his/her consent in order to participate in this project (Appendix A).

#### Dancers

All five dancers were students at San Jose State University in California. The three dancers without wheelchairs (WOC) participated in university dance companies. They were chosen for their technical and artistic abilities. All three dancers had at least three years of dance experience. Their names were Jane, Dan and Brenda (pseudonyms). Two of the dancers used wheelchairs (WWC). Their names were Connie and Ellen (pseudonyms). These two performers had no dance experience. The dancers with disabilities were selected for their commitment and powerful movement styles. Connie used a power wheelchair while Ellen used a manual one. All dancers were selected for their ability to work within a group.

Connie was an individual with CP, which is a chronic neurological condition that effects movement and posture (Sherrill, 1993). Connie was rated a Class 1 United States Cerebral Palsy Athletic Association (USCPAA) athlete. Connie had spasticity in her arms which prevented full range of motion; her hearing and eyesight were affected on one side which made her participation in this dance project challenging but not impossible. Connie was not, however, in any way developmentally disabled.

Connie could not independently leave her chair because of decreased range of motion (ROM) and arm strength. Connie's neck and trunk were also affected which decreases her in-chair mobility. While Connie was dancing, her legs were strapped down in order to maintain her posture and prevent her from sliding out of the chair. Her legs could bear the weight of another person, which allowed dancers WOC to sit in her lap.

Ellen was a wheelchair athlete who had poliomyelitis. Ellen used long leg braces to assist her in walking, but she used a chair for sports and dance. Ellen was affected in her left leg but had full use of her upper body. Ellen contracted polio at a young age. Consequently, she had a well developed upper body and a relatively small lower body. Ellen did not experience chronic pain in her legs, which allowed a dancer WOC to sit in her lap. Ellen could independently exit and re-enter her chair. Ellen did not wear leg braces while dancing because it prevented a dancer from sitting in her lap.

#### First Inspiration

The choreographer listed the compositional parameters: a group piece including dancers with disabilities; a physical and vigorous movement dynamic; partnering (between dancers WWC and dancers WOC) and an exciting movement design. The first inspiration came from music by the Kronos Quartet. In their CD, "Pieces of Africa," the Kronos Quartet explored African rhythms and sounds. The choreographer imagined the majestic and idiosyncratic movements of the African elephants. African elephants travel in packs lead by one matriarch. One of the dancers using a wheelchair could represent the matriarch; a duet could be young bulls sparring. The dance could be divided into three parts (morning, noon, and night), which represented a day in the life of an elephant. When it arose, the choreographer pursued this inspiration writing down as many ideas as possible.



### Movement Ideas

The choreographer began with solo rehearsals that explored a wheelchair's movement potential. The process was analogous to free writing. The choreographer was not concerned with form, polishing, or structural details; the main focus of this exploration was to generate ideas. It was helpful to document interesting movements. Precious phrases would have been lost if they had not been written down. A lengthy feeling of suspension and a momentary feeling of buoyancy were achieved by linking turning and gliding, two movements that seemed natural to the wheelchair. After placing these movements on the dancers WWC, the choreographer discovered that a power chair moved with a different dynamic than the manual chair. Given the different movement styles of all the dancers, the choreographer decided to focus on individuality and not conformity.

### Loss of First Inspiration

The African elephant theme inspired structure but not the creation of movement. The choreographic process, however, continued during group rehearsals with general movement exploration. The choreographer imagined that dancers WOC could do cartwheels or suspensions over the dancers WWC. The wheelchairs' armrests, however, were not designed to bear that much weight. Instead, the choreographer explored pushing off from a wall and spiraling the upper body, which created a suspended movement in the manual chair.

### Creation of the First Material

A dancer WWC pushed off a dancer WOC, and created a suspended dynamic by spiraling the upper body. The choreography linked together four previously created phrases, and the first material had been created. Connie could achieve a similar dynamic by adroitly moving the control lever on her power chair. The first group improvisation resulted in too much action directed at the dancers WWC by the dancers WOC. The

dancers WWC tended to remain central while the dancers WOC circled around them. The choreographer decided to structure future improvisations by designating which dancers remained inside the circle and which dancers moved around the periphery. This became a crucial design element when the choreographer structured a "free play" motif in the last section of the dance.

The choreographer created the "push away and return" duet in a manual chair and then adapted it for the dancer with a power chair and the dancers WOC. Until this point, the choreographer created the dance by exploring movement in a wheelchair and then adapting it for the dancers WOC. In order to challenge the dancers WOC, the author began to set movement on the dancers WOC and adapting it back to the dancers WWC. The choreography evolved into a process of creating movement on one group of dancers and then adapting for another.

The choreographer was sensitive throughout in his verbal instructions when adapting movement back and forth between disabled and able-bodied dancers. A phrase like "you could at least move your hands up" would have been disrespectful to a dancer with a disability. A more appropriate phrase would have been "try and move your hands up."

Unison movement (dancers executing movement simultaneously) tended to highlight the limited movement capacities of the dancers WWC. The choreographer believed that unison movement would not have created a strong movement design and, therefore, he began to explore complimentary designs amongst the different dancers. A complementary design attempted to supplement rather than mimic the movement design of one dancer onto another.

### The Second Inspiration

The choreographer began contemplating ideas of conditional and unconditional love as possible inspirations for movement and form. The former radiates energy and

movement inwards, while the later radiates everything outwards. The choreographer waited to see if this new theme would generate movement.

After reflecting upon depression, the choreographer realized that depression corresponded to unconditional love and a momentary downturn in the cycle of life. The dance's new theme became the natural up and down cycle of life. It also elaborated upon the previous idea of possessive and non possessive love. The natural cycle of life contained much more emotion than African elephants. It was also something that the dancers and choreographer had personally experienced. The new theme quickly generated lots of movement and ideas. The ideas flowed so fast that it was difficult to write them all down ( Appendix B).

The dance eventually developed into three sections (depression/alienation, sleep, and euphoria) represented by three pieces of music from the Kronos Quartet CD, "Pieces of Africa." The first section portrayed an individual engulfed by depression. Listening to the music, the choreographer visualized a "skating motif" and an individual isolated from the group. Music visualization also produced moments of chaotic group movement. The transition from depression directly into euphoria seemed unlikely. An additional song from the same CD had a dreamy quality. Sleep and dreaming were the great equalizers that represented a transition away from a depressed state. Sleep and the arrival of a new day always gave an individual another chance. A single motif could be repeated throughout all three sections to create continuity. The theme of an emotional cycle experienced throughout life unified the whole piece.

#### Movement Exploration Between the Dancers WWC

Connie, the dancer with the power chair, could tow Ellen, the dancer with the manual chair, behind her. When Ellen held on to the back of Connie's chair, she could glide smoothly behind Connie while switching hands and changing sides. This created a

playful image of birds flocking. This image was further explored and eventually placed in the third section because of its happy character.

### Initial Group Rehearsals

Ellen was a wheelchair athlete and not a dancer. She naturally moved in a quick and powerful fashion that stood out during lyrical group movements. In order to expand her movement vocabulary, Ellen required extra solo rehearsals.

The choreographer began by setting a movement on the dancers that was inspired by the painting "The Scream," by Edward Munch. The dancers also learned a running and punching movements that were inspired by feelings of isolation. These movements looked too symmetrical in a circle. The choreographer changed the design element by asking the dancers to break out of the circle after eight counts. The dancers WOC looked much more dramatic than the dancers WWC because of differences in speed and height. The choreographer eventually replaced this whole section with movement that was better adapted to the dancers WWC.

The choreographer also structured some "pushing-away" movements between the dancers WWC and the dancers WOC. Pushing-off was a full-bodied and visually satisfying between dancers with a variety of abilities. The choreographer structured the pushing-away movement into the warm-up exercise hoping that it would become a natural movement for the dancers.

The "moving sculpture" movement involved dancers WOC draped over dancers WWC. Connie's power chair created a more dramatic effect than Ellen's manual chair. The choreographer resolved to create two different duets. Connie's duet would travel around the room while Ellen's duet would be stationary.

At this point, the choreographer was only generating and accumulating movement. The choreographer put his trust in the process: generate lots of movement, and then sequence the separate parts into a dance.

### Mapping Out The Dance

The choreographer realized that a strong ending was an integral part of a successful dance. The author began exploring possible endings early in his creative process. The choreographer looked for more than just a re-introduction of the beginning section at end of the dance, which would have been a natural conclusion for the cycle of life. With the dance loosely structured, the choreographer listened to the music and visualized movement. The choreographer attempted to imagine the entire dance.

### Creation of Duets In The Dream Sequence

The choreographer laid across Connie's chair and then moved to the next possible position. The goal was to find two different positions on top of Connie's chair while sliding down to the floor. The parameters for creating movement were: the physical structure of the power chair and gravity. The choreographer clearly knew the starting point, the end point, and the movement's dynamic. The result was an effortless creative process.

### Setting Movement To Counts

At this point, the choreographer set group spatial design to specific counts in order to strengthen its dynamic. Once specific counts had been set, the dancers immediately moved with more conviction. Absenteeism became a problem while the choreographer was setting intricate group designs.

### Searching For A Unifying Element

The choreographer had developed two similar movements: the "happy walks" and the "alienated walks." The author was concerned that these two movements would be indistinguishable and, therefore, misunderstood. The choreographer radically changed the spatial design of the alienated walk by making the performers enter from the corners of the stage. The similar walking movement now looked very different in terms of spatial design. If the dancers emerged from the corners of the stage, the audience could

symbolically include themselves in the experience. Similar movements in the first and third sections also unified the dance.

#### Time and Resource Limitations

Because of time limitations, the choreographer let the dancers contribute to the composition process. The dancers felt more comfortable performing their own choreography, which resulted in an increased conviction of execution. Delegation of choreography greatly expedited the compositional process.

#### First Video Tape Feedback Session

The graduate choreography class responded to the rehearsal tape by remarking that there was too much running during the skating motif in the first section. Any movement loses its strength if it is repeated too many times. While viewing the tape, the choreographer also noticed a lack of clarity in the spatial design. Originally, the author attempted to portray alienation by spatially pitting an individual against the group. Rather than continually switching soloists, the choreographer decided to have a single dancer portray alienation. The choreographer also cut out movement from the alienation section (two dancers WWC crushing a dancer WOC) because it looked too literal. The choreographer attempted to set new movement that did not directly coincide with the natural increases and decreases in the musical dynamic and tempo. Some of the existing choreography had become too predictable because it directly mirrored the tempo of the music.

#### Stepping Back From the Work

The choreographer did not create any movement for more than a week. During this time, movement emerged that was not inspired by feelings of alienation, sleep or euphoria. The newly created movement ("hand clasping" motif) possessed a unique and genuine quality. Later in the process, this motif inspired the creation of movement for the dream section.

### Repetition Creates Unity

The choreographer replaced the “crushing motif” in the first section with a new movement. The alienated dancer moved between the other dancers who were executing a slow version of the happy walk from the third section. Repeating movement created unity and would aid the audience’s comprehension of this abstract art form. Spatially isolating a dancer was less literal than crushing one, but visually even more powerful.

The choreographer needed more material for the alienation section. The author used images of automated dancers moving like clock work to inspire a figure eight spatial design. Circles were spatial designs that highlighted the movement potential of dancers WWC. The choreographer set the soloist in the center of circles produced by the other dancers, which created a strong feeling of alienation. The figure eight design was less dramatic than the previous alienation motifs, and it created diversity in the first section.

At this point, a new title emerged: “Riders of the Storm.” The choreographer believed that the performers in this dance were at the mercy of the life cycle. The dancers achieved happiness by making peace with the cycle rather than fighting its less desirable moments. The downswings in the cycle anticipated and created momentum for the upswings.

### Overzealous Editing

In decreasing the amount of the skating motif in the first section, the choreographer discovered that he had also eliminated many of its poetic moments. To remedy the situation, the choreographer expanded the section with happy walks against the “solo scream” motif. In addition, the choreographer simplified the design element by having the group freeze during the alienated solo. The choreographer continued to have solo rehearsals with Ellen. The author made specific choreographic adaptations so that Ellen could complement the group during unison movements. The choreographer completely removed the running punching motif because it looked too chaotic, and the

dancers WWC could not run and punch at the same time. This also reduced the amount of running in the first section. The new movement emerged as an abstraction from a couple in conversation. The soloist danced between the two couples, and thus exaggerated her exclusion from their conversations. The new movement also allowed the dancers WWC to stop moving before they had to create shapes with their upper bodies.

The choreographer had hoped to include a subtle turning of the dancers heads while the group was static and the soloist was dancing. A slight turn of the head, however, did not have a sufficient visual impact and was subsequently removed.

#### Form Guides the Choreography

To complement the duet created for the power chair, the choreographer created a duet for Jane and Ellen. Ellen's manual chair was tipped back onto Jane, who then propelled Ellen's chair around by her leg. The "lasso duet" motif, from the warm up exercises, was added and the duet was complete.

#### A Rehearsal Pattern Emerged

The choreographer established a cyclical rehearsal pattern: first movement ideas were explored, and then more specific counts and designs followed. During the first rehearsal, the choreographer and dancers explored new movement ideas. In the second rehearsal, the choreographer crystallized the movement by providing the dancers with specific counts and movement shapes. The third rehearsal finalized the movement, and the group moved on to a new idea.

#### Using All Three Planes of Movement

The choreographer wanted to explore all three planes of movement: the low plane (on the ground), the middle plain (standing for dancers WOC, and sitting for dancers WWC), and the high plain (dancers WOC on top of dancers WWC). By changing the planes in which the dancers performed, the choreographer also changed the audience's perspective. With the dancers WOC sitting on the floor, the dancers WWC now became the dominant



figures in terms of space and dynamic. Changing perspectives also emphasized the dance's emotional content by highlighting the feeling of alienation. This was accomplished by a dancer WOC standing in the scream motif on top of a dancer WWC.

#### The Deadline Motivated Choreography

More than half of the rehearsals had been spent on completing the first section. As the performance deadline approached, the choreographer adjusted appropriately; he incorporated most of the warm-up and exploration material into the dance. The "heart push-away" motif completed the alienation solo. The slow movement in the dream section, however, looked weak. To compensate, the choreographer decided to make the dream section gestures bigger.

#### The Second Video Tape Feedback Session

The graduate choreography class enjoyed the imbalance created by the dancers WWC during symmetrical group sections. Symmetrical designs were strengthened by the off-setting visual effect of dancers with and without wheelchairs doing the same movement. The choreographer recognized this as one of the choreographic tools for dancers with disabilities.

#### Improvisation During the Dream Section

The choreographer brought in postcards from art exhibits and his travels in order to stimulate discussion about dreaming. The first dream improvisations were very successful: the "hand over the eye" gesture became a dream motif, and Ellen removed herself from her chair and moved about in a sitting position. Once the dream improvisation was placed between two sections of structured movement, it looked slow and weak. The choreographer decided that the intended improvisational section was too long for dancers with limited experience. The author tried to structure the beginning, middle and end positions of the improvisation, but the movement still looked weak. A

week before the performance, the choreographer shortened the musical score and completely eliminated improvisation from the dream section.

### Simplifying and Finding the End

The last weeks before the performance consisted of putting together all the separate phrases and performing the three sections one after another. When the dancers finally performed the entire piece some problems in the choreography emerged; the dancers had trouble making smooth transitions between the three sections and entering intricate group designs. All the transitions needed to be practiced until each dancer's path became clear. Difficult group designs which had been learned separately now had to be relearned in sequence. When movements looked sloppy or weak, the choreographer simplified the design element, which usually removed the problems by maintaining the flow of the dance. Simplifying movement also ensured the safety of dancers during difficult moving sculpture positions. For the conclusion of "Riders of the Storm," the choreographer attempted to condense and recapitulate the dance's opening sections. Time constraints, however, prevented a thorough editing of this section. After the dance was finished, the choreographer switched his attention to the novice dancers. These dancers were instructed on how to mentally and emotionally prepare themselves for the performance.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

This chapter presents the results from a questionnaire administered to the general audience and dance experts immediately after the performance of "Riders of the Storm." Thirty three members of the general audience answered five close-ended questions (Appendix D) that probed their emotional response to the dance. The scale was labeled as follows: "1" corresponded to strongly disagree; "4" corresponded to neutral; "7" corresponded to strongly agree. The general audience also ranked four thematic concepts in order of importance on a scale from "1" to "4". The dance experts received a different questionnaire. They answered five close ended questions about compositional principles on an identical scale from "1" to "7", and four short essay questions (Appendix E). Finally, a video tape and an experts' questionnaire were sent to five experts in the field of adapted dance. Three of the adapted dance experts returned a questionnaire.

#### The Choreographer's Response

The choreographer viewed the performance of "Riders of the Storm" and later, he watched the videotape. The author felt that the dance contained many visually riveting moments which were created by the high level of commitment and interaction between all the dancers. The dance benefited from a strong structure and form. The choreographer felt, however, that "Riders of the Storm" needed more clarity in movement design. Specifically, the transition from section one into section two was not clearly defined. The choreographer felt that the dance remained in the same dynamic for too long. Changes from this dynamic were too brief and infrequent.

At times, a dancer's gestures during the "conversation duet" were completely obscured by his/her partner. These duets should have been staged perpendicular to the audience. The transition from section one into section two was unclear and unstructured.

The dancers needed more specifically choreographed movements that would have filled the space until the end of the first song.

The beginning of the second section was visually enticing. The hand clasping motif united the performers in similar shapes, yet it allowed the dancers' bodies to maintain their individuality. All the duets (moving sculptures, "dragging sequence") were visually exciting but they should have been arranged in a more clear and specific fashion. Sometimes, the group designs appeared to be haphazardly assembled.

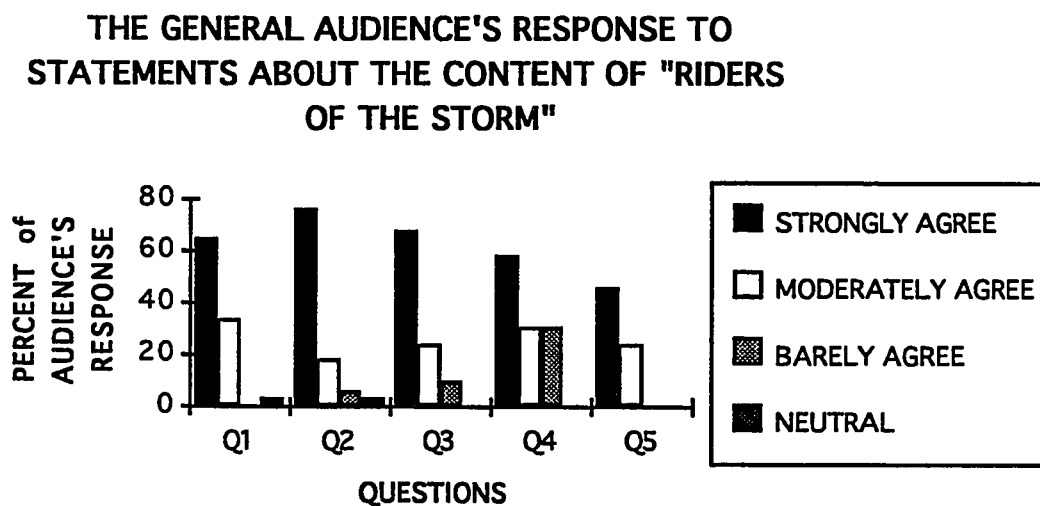
In the transition into section three, the dancers demonstrated their profound respect for each other with the intimacy of their gestures. The third section began with a happy and energetic dynamic. The dance developed well until the play section, in which the play motif was repeated three times when twice would have sufficed. The wide open runs in the middle of section three remained in the same dynamic too long. This running dynamic, however, may have been dictated by the inherent speed of Connie's power chair. The end of section three developed slowly and was unclear. The reiteration of the first section at the end of this dance was not clearly developed. The final design was visually captivating, but it was not preceded by a logical development of movement phrases.

#### The General Audience's Response

The general audience reacted favorably to "Riders of the Storm." In response to the first question, 64% of the audience strongly agreed that the dance maintained their attention. In the second question, 76% of the audience strongly agreed that viewing Riders of the Storm was a unique experience. In response to the third question, 67% of the audience strongly agreed that the dancers WWC were well integrated into the dance. In the fourth question, 58% of the audience strongly agreed that they enjoyed the dance. In response to the last question, 45% of the audience moderately agreed that they

experienced intense emotions during "Riders of the Storm." No one from the general audience disagreed with any question. For additional information, see Figure 1.

Figure 1



Note. Q1-The dance maintained my attention.

Q2-This dance was a unique experience.

Q3-The dancers with wheelchairs were well integrated  
into the dance.

Q4-I enjoyed this dance.

Q5-I experienced intense emotion while viewing this dance.

The general audience also ranked four thematic concepts (Alienation and Depression, Euphoria, The Natural Cycle Of Life Is Transition, Dreams) in order of importance on a scale from "1" to "4" based on their experience of "Riders of the Storm." Fifty two percent of the audience responded that the Cycle of Life was the most important concept presented in the dance. The second and third most important concept were evenly distributed between Euphoria, Dreams and the Cycle of Life. Seventy percent of the audience believed that alienation was the least important concept in Riders of the Storm. For additional details, see Figure 2 through Figure 5.

Figure 2

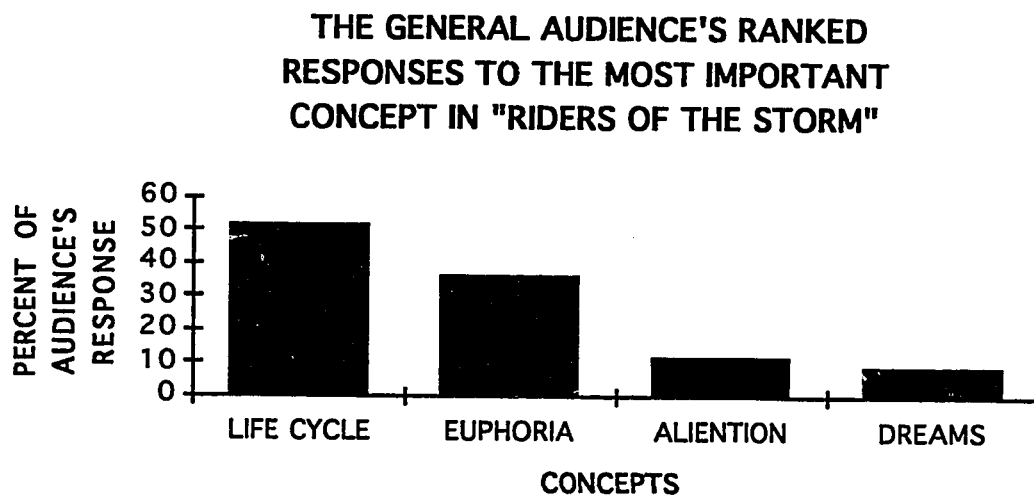


Figure 3

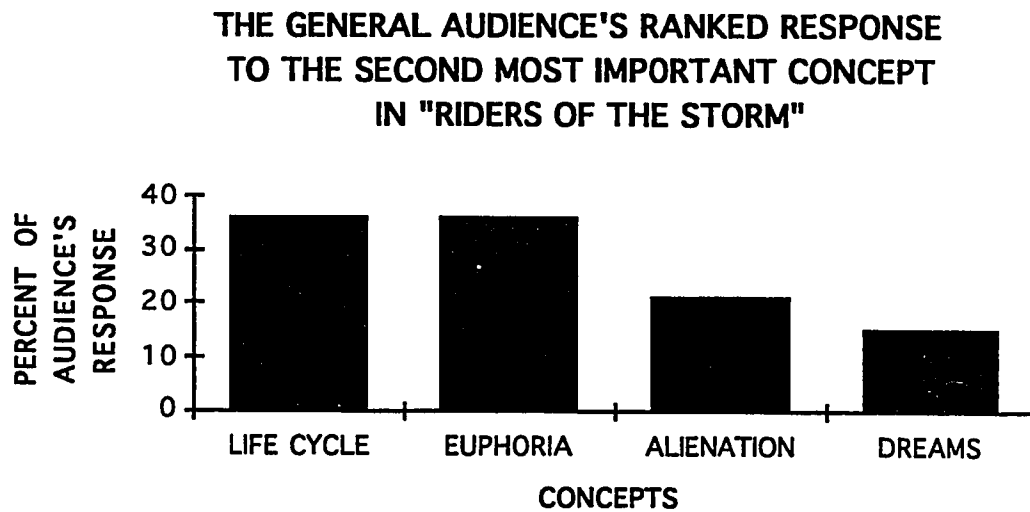


Figure 4

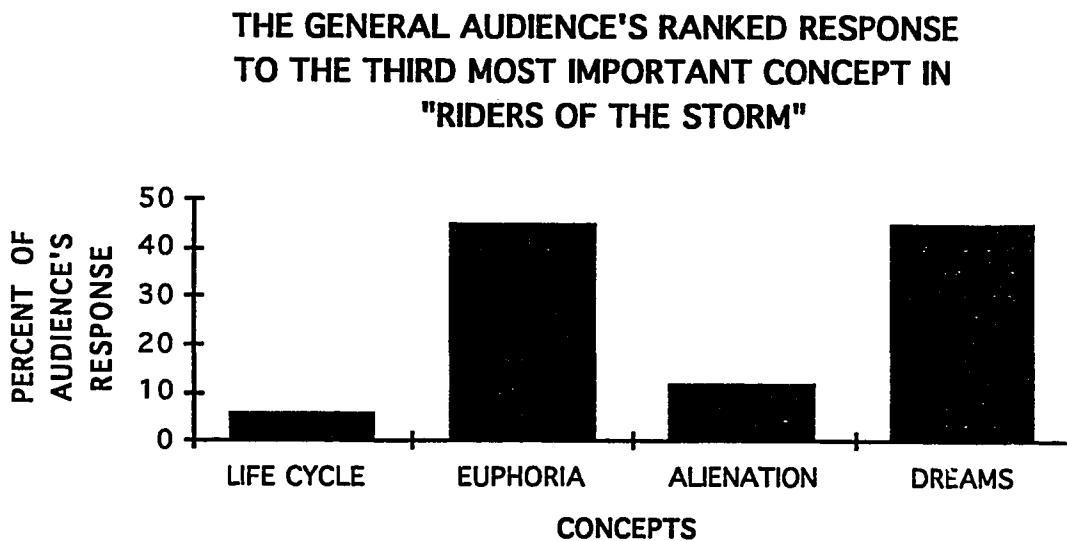
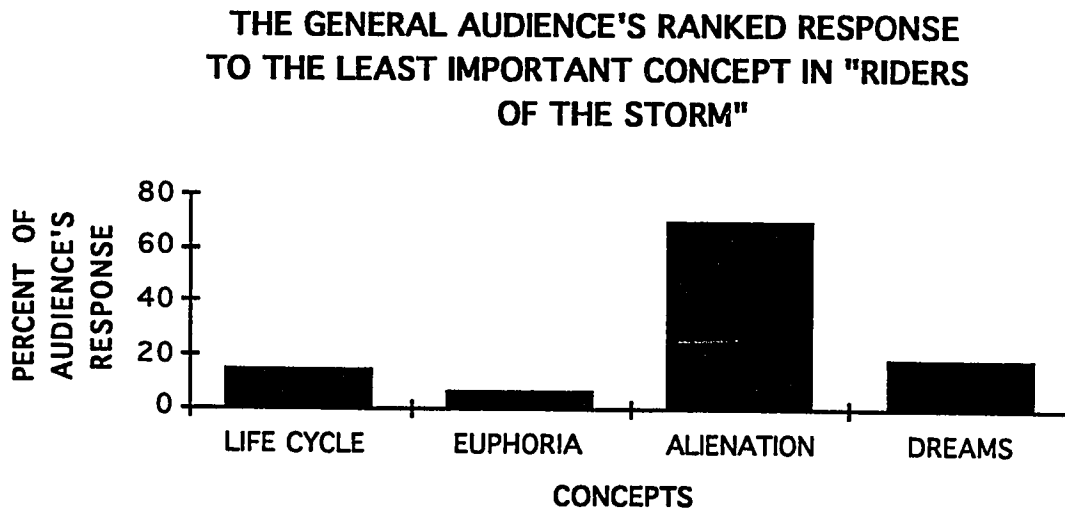


Figure 5



#### The Dance Experts' Response

The three dance experts, who were professors of technique and choreography, answered four short essay questions and five close-ended questions about the dance's structure, form and compositional elements (Appendix E). In the first essay question, the experts agreed that "Riders of the Storm" achieved an organic sense of unity, and that the dance took on a life of its own. A consistent movement style and a progressive exploration of thematic material contributed to the dance's unity. "Riders of the Storm" used repetition and changes in form to create a well structured and dynamic dance. The dynamics within a single movement phrase, however, did not change with a sufficient frequency. An expert observed that the choreography contained too much movement with sustained energy. The experts agreed that "Riders of the Storm" demonstrated good form by introducing themes and variations, and it contrasted set movement with



improvisation. The movement, however, in the free play section was undefined and unclear.

In the second essay question, the experts agreed that "Riders of the Storm" was well developed and structured. Good spatial design and interesting thematic exploration also contributed to the dance's development. One expert remarked that the performers interacted with the choreography in a strong and vital fashion. The experts believed that successful development in this piece was based on theme and variation, repetition and contrasting movement ideas. "Riders of the Storm," however, could have developed a broader movement design within a single movement phrase. The shapes placed on the dancers bodies, remarked one expert, could have been more varied and dynamic. Although unison movement and repetition were well utilized, the dance could have explored more movements with the dancers WWC. The musical form supported a progressive change of dynamic throughout the entire piece. The three separate sections were clear. The first section, however, sometimes lacked clearly defined movement while the last section did not resolve completely.

In the third essay question, the experts agreed that the dance maintained their attention with the variety of playful sequences. The dance had a strong sense of emotional development; the performers clearly conveyed feelings of trust, sensitivity, and heroism. Movement was clearly stated and resolved. The jumping section, the figure eight section and the solo sections successfully complemented each other. The movements that highlighted the dancers WWC were especially inspiring. Design during group sections could have been more simplified. More innovative moments could have been possible with the dancers WWC. As the spatial design increased to cover greater parts of the stage, the dancers' focus dissipated.

In the last essay question, the experts agreed that the dancers WWC were well integrated into the work. The dancers with disabilities were completely part of the fabric

of this dance, and thus, were elevated to a new realm of experience. The experts believed, however, that a more intricate movement design could have been developed for the dancers WWC.

The dance experts also answered five close ended questions. In response to the first question, all three dance experts strongly agreed (7) that "The theme and concept were clear." In response to the second question, two experts strongly agreed that "The choreographer's use of space was powerful. It facilitated the communication of the theme." One expert's response was neutral (4). In response to the third question, two experts strongly agreed that "The choreographer eliminated all superfluous movement." One expert's response was neutral (4). In response to the fourth question, all three dance experts strongly agreed (7) that "The gestures communicated a clear message." In response to the fifth question, two experts strongly agreed that "The resolutions had an appropriate sense of completion." One expert's response was neutral (4). Later, the choreographer learned that the expert who responded in a neutral fashion to three out of five questions did so because she did not fully understand the questions.

#### The Experts for Dancers with Disabilities Responses

The three experts for dancers with disabilities, who separately viewed a video tape of the performance, agreed, in the first essay question, that the choreography achieved an organic sense of unity. The dance had a life of its own characterized by vibrancy and intriguing exploration. This was accomplished by repetition of phrases and unifying spatial and movement designs. Unity was fostered amongst the dancers through a movement and spatial design that complemented all the performers.

In the second essay question, the experts expressed feeling a sense of development both thematically and in terms of movement design. The dance developed by repeating and expanding upon existing phrases. These phrases developed through

changes in spatial design, dynamic, shape, focus and use of levels. In the third section, the dance culminated by exploding into the playful phrases.

In the third essay question, the experts felt that the choreographer maintained the audience's attention with variety, unity, interesting gestures, and spatial designs. The movement was choreographed with great dignity; it respected every dancer's individuality. The choreographer deftly contrasted rhythmical patterns and spatial designs. This dance was emotionally accessible to the audience because of its clear presentation of thematic material.

In the last essay question, the experts for dancers with disabilities concurred that the choreographer successfully integrated the performers WWC into the dance. Every dancer was an integral part of the whole. Unison movement was successfully and artfully set on the dancers. The dancers WWC created interesting movements with the skillful and rhythmic control of their chairs. The choreographer developed his movement themes into unique partnering situations. One expert believed, however, that a greater variety of movement could be explored for the dancers WWC (movement out of chairs and counterbalancing). Other experts longed for greater interaction between the two dancers WWC. All the dancers, the experts agreed, maintained a tremendous focus during "Riders of the Storm" which rendered a transcendent performance.

The experts for dancers with disabilities also answered five close-ended question. In response to the first question, two experts strongly agreed (7) that "The theme and concept were clear." One expert circled "6". In response to the second question, two experts strongly agreed (7) that "The choreographer's use of space was powerful. It facilitated communication of the theme." One expert circled "6". In response to the third question, one expert strongly agreed (7) that "The choreographer eliminated all superfluous movement." One expert circled "6" while the other answered "5". In response to the fourth question, two experts strongly agreed (7) that "The gestures

communicated a clear message." One expert's response was "6". In response to the fifth question, two experts strongly agreed (7) that "The resolutions had an appropriate sense of completion." One expert responded with a "6".

### Common Themes

In general, the responses to "Riders of the Storm" were very positive. The experts and the choreographer both agreed that the dance's form and structure were strong. The choreography was developed through repetition of themes and changes in focus, spatial design, level of movement and dynamics. The choreographer contrasted structured and unstructured sections which maintained the audience's attention. The dance progressively developed into the explosion of playful energy in the third section.

The dance's strong structure also developed the emotional content and the thematic material. A majority of the audience felt that the cycle of life was the most important concept, and that alienation was the least important concept.

Everyone agreed that the dancers WWC were well integrated into the fabric of "Riders of the Storm." All the dancers were integral to the work. This was demonstrated by their high level of commitment and focus. The choreographer portrayed the dancers WWC as dignified and heroic.

The choreographer, however, could have improved upon a number of compositional principles. During transitions in the first and second sections, the dance lacked clarity in spatial design. The end of the dance needed to be preceded by an observable development. "Riders of the Storm" exhibited too much of one dynamic. Finally, the choreographer could have explored more varied movement design with the dancers WWC.

## CHAPTER 5

### Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The choreographic theory presented in the literature supported the choreographer in his creation of "Riders of the Storm." During the creation of this dance, an adaptive choreographic dialogue emerged between the dancers WWC and the dancers WOC. In this process, several choreographic principles surfaced that were specific to dancers WWC. The choreographer succeeded in creating a dance for performers that highlighted their individual abilities.

The choreographer discovered that it was easier to create movement from personally meaningful themes than from unfamiliar themes. The choreographer's experience was supported in the literature by Humphrey (1959) who urged choreographers to internally motivate every movement.

The choreographer's first inspiration was the African elephant theme, which did not generate any movement. The second inspiration, cycle of life, immediately generated movement, which emerged effortlessly from a deep and personal place. Choreographing movement from themes that were based on personal experiences lead to a more fruitful and meaningful creative process.

Chaffee (1974) described the four stages of choreography (preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification) as not necessarily occurring in a prescribed order. During the creation of "Riders of the Storm," the choreographer experienced these stages occurring at many different times. During the preparation stage, according to Chaffee, a choreographer researches and formulates ideas. The choreographer's preparation stage included extensive movement exploration in a wheelchair. This stage continued half way through the entire project. The preparation stage required additional time because wheelchair movement was a completely new experience for the choreographer.

The choreographer experienced Chaffee's incubation stage at many different times during the creation of "Riders of the Storm." In the incubation stage, according to Chaffee, ideas formulate in the unconscious without surfacing. The author began with extensive movement exploration rather than immediately searching for the dance's structure. The choreographer believed that incubation was occurring during movement exploration. The choreographer's trust in the process was rewarded with two separate episodes of illumination, African elephants and cycle of life.

The choreographer documented that incubation of ideas also occurred in the absence of movement exploration. In the middle of creating "Riders of the Storm," the choreographer completely removed himself from the compositional process. During this brief respite, unique material (the hand clasping motif) was generated that was not directly inspired by alienation, euphoria or dreams. Material generated from a variety of inspirations helped keep the choreographic process vital and dynamic.

During the creation of "Riders of the Storm," the choreographer experienced two episodes of illumination. Chaffee described the illumination stage as a rapid emergence of ideas. The choreographer's first episode of illumination (African elephant) did not generate movement. It did, however, acquaint the choreographer with the musical score. The cycle of life theme soon emerged and produced a volume of structure and material. The choreographer found that patience rather than self-imposed pressure stimulated the illumination of ideas and structures.

The verification stage also occurred frequently throughout the choreographic process. Chaffee described the verification stage as the application of compositional rules and principles. The verification stage occurred with the highest frequency during the last week before performance. At this time, many movement phrases were assembled into a larger whole. The choreographer attempted to unify strong and dynamic

movements while eliminating any superfluous material. The verification stage dramatically increased the strength of "Riders of the Storm."

The choreographer experienced all four stages at different times while creating "Riders of the Storm." The four stages, however, occurred with the greatest frequency in their prescribed order: preparation, incubation, illumination, and then verification. The first three stages generated rough material; the last stage created movement based on phrasing and the choreographic principles. Throughout the creation of "Riders of the Storm," the choreographer made himself available to all four stages by trusting and following his intuition. The illumination stage, however, required complete reliance on trust and intuition. Illumination was the least tangible and controllable stage; it contained the greatest potential for frustration. The choreographer, however, placed his trust in the compositional process and experienced a fruitful illumination stage.

Chaffee's four choreographic stages segmented the compositional process into four separate stages. The choreographer, however, experienced the compositional processes cyclically, with each cycle lasting approximately three rehearsals. The choreographer began by creating material on himself that was motivated by an emotion or an idea. He then set the outline of this movement on the dancers during the first rehearsal. The dancers usually needed more specific information which would strengthen and clarify the new movement's execution. Between rehearsals, the choreographer continued to refine his ideas. In the next rehearsal, the dancers, with more specific information, were able to perform the movement with more conviction. If a strong movement did not emerge by the second rehearsal, the choreographer looked for a weakness in the movement's dynamic or spatial design. Throughout the project, movement and thematic material emerged cyclically.

The choreographer spent a great deal of time on movement exploration and dream improvisation. This exploratory material was never directly transposed into "Riders of

the Storm." As the deadline approached, however, the choreographer used movement and ideas established in the exploratory periods to expedite the compositional process. The dancers relied heavily on their collective exploratory experiences to foster a collective sense of unity and trust. Although early rehearsals seemed to produce little material for the final product, the choreographer and dancers eventually realized the importance of their exploratory experiences.

The editing process changed over the course of this project. The initial creation of movement was immediately followed by an editing process that strengthened the spatial design and movement dynamic within a single phrase. After phrases were built into sections and further arranged into an entire dance, the editing process could focus on creating a unified work. At this point, the choreographer was able to compare the dynamics between many phrases and track their development through an entire piece of choreography. The backdrop of a larger structure facilitated a unifying editing process.

Humphrey (1959) developed many choreographic principles. She believed that visual strength was organized along the two diagonals that intersect at the middle of the stage. The choreographer's experience confirmed that these two diagonals encompassed the most visually powerful areas on stage. The choreographer discovered that if group design became too complicated or cluttered, then it was often because spatial design had been neglected. Underdeveloped spatial design accounted for some of the weaker transitions and cluttered group designs during the performance of "Riders of the Storm." Sometimes, however, a weak or chaotic spatial design was desirable. The free play motif in the third section and the "big run" in the first section demonstrated the appropriate use of an unstructured spatial design. The alienated run section had a feeling of unresolved despair while the free play section reflected the spontaneity of children's games.

The choreographer and a dance expert felt that the ending of "Riders of the Storm" did not sufficiently resolve itself. The end position of this dance was strong, but it was



not preceded by a clear spatial development. The choreographer did not appropriately develop the last phrases of this dance because of time constraints. At the end of "Riders of the Storm," the choreographer attempted to recapitulate and condense the dance's beginning phrases. In the performance, the design positions achieved by the dancers lacked the clarity to approximate the beginning of the dance. The dancers were not able to learn this complicated spatial design in addition to unifying all the separate sections in the last week of rehearsals. The dance's conclusion was left until the end of the choreographic process, and the performance suffered accordingly.

Hawkins (1964) and Humphrey (1959) believed that gestures could be powerful choreographic tools if they were not perceived as being too literal. The choreographer removed a crushing motif from the first section of "Riders of the Storm" because it looked too literal. The scream motif, however, was successful because it was sufficiently abstracted, yet it still portrayed a sorrowful feeling. The successful use of gestures in "Riders of the Storm" depended upon the correct degree of abstraction.

A majority of the audience responded that the cycle of life was the most important concept in "Riders of the Storm," but even a larger majority believed that alienation was the least important concept. It was the choreographer's intention to portray cycle of life as the most important concept and all other concepts as being equal. Modern dance is an abstract art form and, therefore, will always be subject to individual interpretation. The choreographer did not believe that "Riders of the Storm" should be judged on the correctness of the audience's interpretations, but rather on the strength of the audience's reaction. Simon (1982) concurred that an audience can sense emotion and understand the use of gestures, but they cannot always comprehend the use of complex themes.

The choreographer felt that many aspects of creating a dance for performers with disabilities were not addressed in his review of literature. Dancers WWC who move with their full potential will require a large space in which to perform. This excludes most

theatrical stages, which have many advantages. A theatrical stage has production lights and wings that allow for dramatic entrances and exits. A theatrical stage is enclosed by a proscenium arch, which focuses an audiences' attention onto the dancers. The performance space used for "Riders of the Storm" was a gymnasium. The performers remained on stage because there were no appropriate exits. This was a design constraint that may be associated with dance for individuals with disabilities. The choreographer could have strengthened certain sections of "Riders of the Storm" by having fewer dancers on stage: A solo provides a refreshing change from group dynamic and spatial design. A choreographer whose performers cannot leave the stage must manipulate the audience's focus accordingly. In the first section of "Riders of the Storm," the choreographer had the group freeze while Brenda danced her alienated solo. The group could have also performed a slow and repetitive movement. Any movement that does not demand the audience's attention automatically shifts it to a place that does. In the first section, the choreographer was forced to manipulate the audience's focus between group and solo sections. This choreographic technique maintained the audience's interest and strengthened the dance.

Unfortunately, the large performance space that allowed the dancers WWC full mobility also dissipated the dancers' energy and focus. As a dancer's spatial design increased, his/her performance intensity conversely decreased. In the third section of "Riders of the Storm," the dancers filled the entire space with large circular runs. This section remained in the same dynamic too long, and consequently lost some of its strength. As the spatial design increased, the choreographer should have strengthened the spatial design or changed the dynamic.

Humphrey (1959) said that "symmetry is lifeless." The choreographer, however, found that symmetrical design could be very successful for dancers WWC. Symmetrical design, which usually has a calming effect, was dynamic because of the additional visual

stimulus provided by the dancers WWC. In choreography for dancers WWC, symmetrical design can be employed with a greater frequency because of the visual imbalance created by the juxtaposition of dancers with and without wheelchairs.

Remaining in the same dynamic is fatal, according to Humphrey (1959). After viewing "Riders of the Storm," the choreographer realized that several factors had combined to produce too much of one dynamic. In response to the questionnaire, a dance expert reflected that this dance exhibited too much sustained and bound energy. Bartenieff and Lewis (1980) described bound energy as controlled and focused inward. Sustained energy produced a leisurely effort that did not hasten towards completion. Sustained and bound energy was the choreographer's natural dynamic of creation: he felt most comfortable choreographing in this dynamic. Connie's power chair also projected the dynamic of sustained energy. Finally, the dream section of "Riders of the Storm" contained too much movement choreographed with a sustained energy. This movement did produce the desired meditative and hypnotic effect associated with dreams. But even the dream section would have benefited from more movement with a quickly changing dynamic. The combined effect of the choreographer's natural compositional style, the dynamic energy produced by Connie's power chair, and the prevailing dynamic during the dream section resulted in "Riders of the Storm" containing too much movement with sustained and bound energy. This dance would have benefited from different compositional dynamics which would have produced a more vital and exciting performance.

All movement, according to Humphrey (1959), looks weaker on stage. Because dancers with disabilities are in some way physically challenged, they are especially susceptible to having their movements appear weaker on stage. To counter this, the choreographer attempted to create strong movement design with frequent changes in dynamic. Increasing the strength and dynamic of design elements allowed dancers with

disabilities to perform at their highest potential. The choreographer found this to be especially true during the dream section. In the last week before performance, an entire improvisational section was cut out of the dream section because the movement appeared too weak. The improvisation contained many small movements which appeared even smaller on the dancers WWC. The choreographer had insufficient time to increase the strength of the movement design in the dream section, and, therefore, the entire improvisation was removed. Finally, Humphrey believed that most dances were too long. Perhaps, the dream section was strengthened when its length was shortened.

The choreographer discovered new compositional techniques for dancers with disabilities while creating "Riders of the Storm." During this process, the choreographer discovered two things. Firstly, choreography for dancers with disabilities was a process of adapting movement back and forth between dancers WWC and dancers WOC. Secondly, dancers WWC have their own movement language. Because dancers WWC periodically need to impulse or control their chairs, they were not able to execute movement with continuous changes in the upper body. Consequently, the choreographer created phrases that incorporated many starts and stops. These phrases allowed the dancers WWC to control their chairs before executing designs. The choreographer also incorporated design changes in the upper bodies of dancers WOC that complemented the dancers WWC controlling their chairs. Connie used a power chair, and continuously had one hand on her controls lever. In order to accentuate Connie's abilities, the choreographer created group design which incorporated the right hand down.

The choreographer failed to document the relationship between the process of choreography and the dancers themselves. The choreographer did note an increased self-esteem and camaraderie between the dancers. The novice dancers with disabilities relished the experience of creating, learning, and performing. The dancers WOC

increased their appreciation for the abilities of the dancers WWC. Unfortunately, this was not documented.

In summary, the choreographer created a dynamic and well choreographed dance, "Riders of the Storm," that integrated performers with a wide variety of abilities. This process was documented in a rehearsal log. Most of the choreographic principles described in the literature also applied to dancers with disabilities. The dancers WWC, however, had a number of specific compositional and performance needs. Movement phrases that had frequent starts, stops and changes in direction facilitated their performance. The choreographer could use symmetrical design with a greater frequency, and he had to manipulate the audience's focus. Choreography for performers with disabilities was a process that could adapt in order to ensure a dancer's full participation. The dancers' WWC presence uniquely contributed to the performance. The dance, however, would have benefited from a more frequent change in dynamic, and more movement exploration for the dancers WWC.

Future choreographers for dancers with disabilities should manipulate the compositional tools in order to strengthen a dancer's visual impact, control the audience's focus, and break up the single dynamic produced by a moving power chair. In addition, choreographers should promote an adapted choreographic dialogue between the dancers with and without disabilities and themselves. Sometimes, complementary design will strengthen the movement of a dancer WWC more than an identical design. Choreographers, however, should not shy away from unison movement with identical design, and they should document how the compositional process affects the self esteem of performers with disabilities.

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**APPENDIX A****Agreement to Participate in Research**

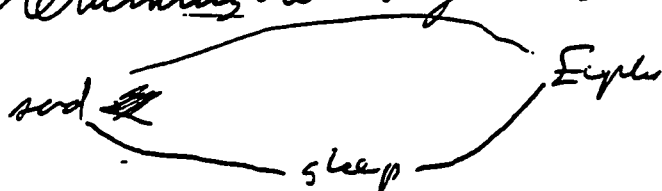
**Responsible Investigator: Edvins Puris**

**Title of Protocol: Documenting and Evaluating the Choreographic Process of Creating a dance for performers with and without disabilities.**

- 1) I have been asked(or, my child or ward has been asked) to participate in a research study investigating the choreographic process involving dancers with disabilities.
- 2) I will be asked to (or my child or ward will be asked to) to view a piece of modern dance and than fill out a questionnaire about either its content or structure. The study will occur at 2:00 PM on Sunday, the 15th of May in SPX 89.
- 3) Subjects who participate in this study are not expected to experience any foreseeable risks or discomforts.
- 4) Subjects who participate in this study may benefit by increasing their awareness about modern dance and individuals with disabilities.
- 5) The results of this study may be published, but no information that could identify the subjects will be included.
- 6) Subjects will not be compensated for participation in this study.
- 7) Questions about the research may be addressed to the principal investigator (415 856-8187). Complaints about the research may be presented to the HuP Department Chair (James Bryant, 408 924-3010). Questions or complaints about the research, subjects' rights, or researched-related injury may be presented to Serena Stanford, Ph.D., Associate Academic Vice President for Graduate Studies and Research, at (408) 924-2480.
- 8) No services of any kind, to which a subject is otherwise entitled, will be lost or jeopardized if a person chooses to "not participate" in the study.
- 9) A subject may refuse to participate in the study or in any part of the study. If a subject decides to participate in the study, he or she is free to withdraw at any time without prejudice to the subject's relations with San Jose State University or any other participating organization.
- 10) Completion of a questionnaire by the subject indicates that consent has been given.

## APPENDIX B

I am beginning to think about  
saying that cycle is inevitable, and  
returning to beginning, but more



can have same thing music, changes  
will change it.

- we tried the skaters, they looked O.K., probably  
with chairs at that point,  
right now I have starting sad happy moment  
hints of screams

wake up  
euphoric  
push away  
happy / happy theme  
(wheelchair drag race)  
spin in the end

screams  
alienates skaters  
push away  
push away alone  
into sleep

sleep pick up  
sleep drag  
sleep drop off

I've pulled down  
as much as I can have as many breaks.





**Please answer the following questions based on your experience of “Riders of the Storm”, the fourth piece in the program.**

**1) Did the choreography achieve an organic sense of unity? Did the piece have a life of its own? If so, how was this achieved? Unifying style, design or dynamic? Repetition?**

**2) Did the dance have a sense of development? If so, how? Did the choreographer develop movement phrases, thematic material or spatial design?**

**3) Did the choreographer maintain your attention? If so, how? Did he change the dynamic or motivate the movement?**

**4) Did the choreographer successfully integrate the disabled dancers to the dance? Was unison movement underutilized? Did the choreographer allow the disabled dancers to use their abilities and make unique contributions?**